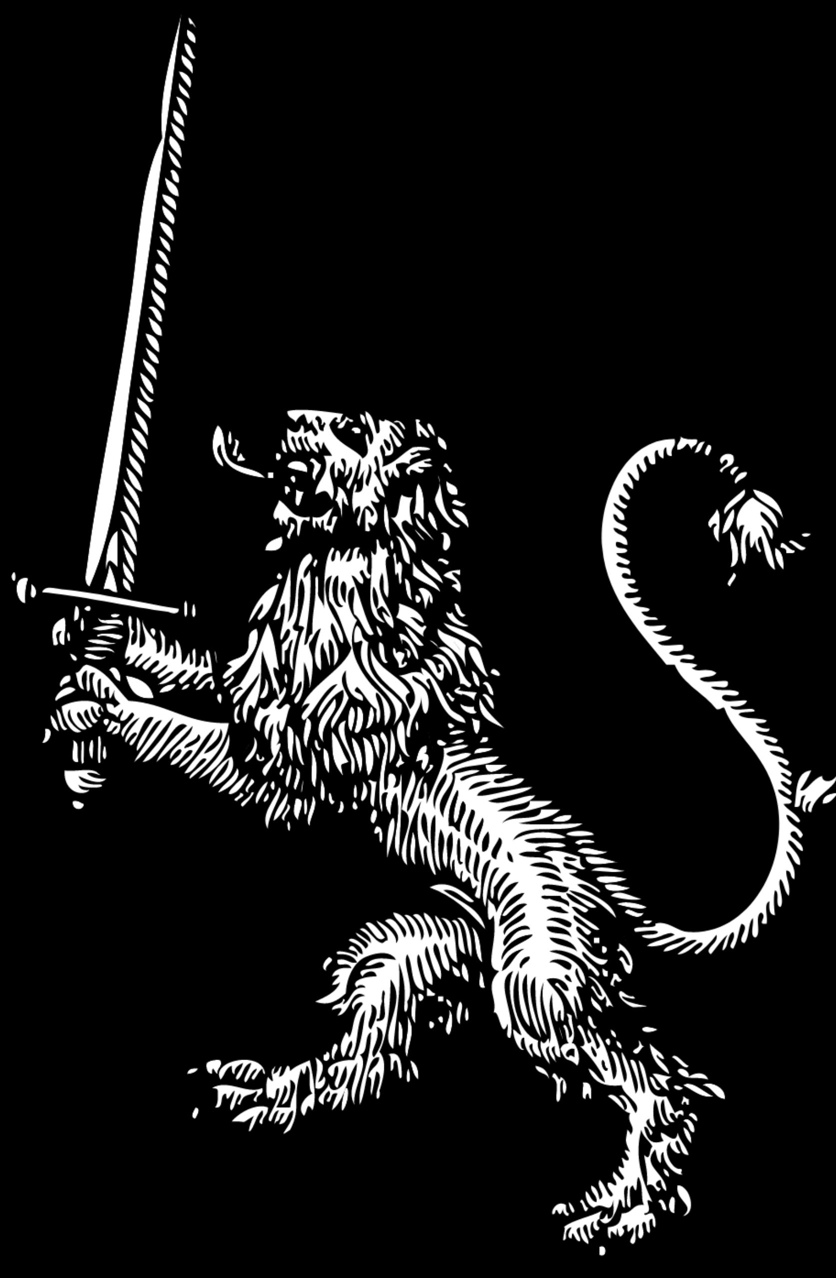
Blood Stains My Hands



By Leif Simmons

<u>Blood Stains My Hands</u>

I have been having these dreams, these dreams about a young girl calling out for me. She is in some kind of cellar, muttering to herself, then breaking out into fits of blood-curdling screams. Her body was covered in scratches and bites from rats from when she lay on the ground unmoving, she was a shell of the legend she used to be. I'd wake up, dragged back into my world, as soon as she would finally lock eyes with me. Oh her eyes…. They sunk into her skull, reflecting what was left of her soul. They were gray, like the wisps of death's cloak, begging to be saved from death's cold, unforgiving clutches. She became such a common guest in my dreams that I was no longer fearful of her. I started feeling desperate to help her, I would try and yell over her fits of screaming, begging her to tell me what was happening.

I'd yell "What can I do?!", " Let me help you?!" ," Why are you ignoring me ?!". On the 9th night of this, I had finally accepted the truth: she couldn't hear me. After that night of realization, I started to become hopeless. After her visits, I would fall into a deep bottomless pit of dejected despair. I would wake up covered in bites and cuts like her world was starting to bleed into mine. Then, one night something impossible happened. I had told myself this would be my last attempt to reach her, as soon as I awoke in this foreign world her usual muttering began. Then came the outbursts of screams. "Let me help you!" I screamed back. She quickly halted her screams and her neck snapped towards me.

As soon as she realized I was there she let out a new scream. This one wasn't full of madness, this one was one of terror. "Be gone Demon! I am a daughter of Christ!" She hissed

ragefully. I fell to my knees, aghast with this new revelation. She grabs two pieces of straw frantically, crafting them into a crucifix. “I have so many questions! Who are you? Where are we? Why am I here?” I yelled in curiosity. “ Don’t speak Demon! You can not sway me from my path of righteousness!” She howled in fear. As soon as she screeched the last syllable two guards ran in.

They were dressed like old knights in a princess fairytale, like the kind that you read in books. The guards rushed in with long spear-like swords, pointing their weapons toward the girl. She tried to leap onto them but she was too weak and ended up on the floor with a spear against her neck. She screamed and pointed at me, all of the air left my lungs. I stood tall and closed my eyes, waiting for a spear to pierce my body forcing me into death.

But there was nothing, no rushing towards me, no cold spear piercing me. I opened my eyes and there was no recognition in theirs, they were looking through me like I was transparent. I felt like I was a ghost, a cold sweat began to take over my body. The guards finally turned back towards the girl and started yelling in some sort of gibberish. “What do you mean you don’t see him?! He is standing right there you fools!” The girl screamed hysterically. The guards took a step back and spoke to each other in a foreign tongue. They said something that made her scream in the most heart-wrenching madness-filled shriek. “No! Don’t let them kill me! I am not a heathen, I did nothing wrong! Let me speak to King Charles VII! He will free me!” She seethed as the guards finally left the stone dungeon muttering something I wish I understood.

“You there, sinner.” She gasped out to me, her voice horse from the constant screaming. “Please, if you can help me in any way, save me !” She cried. “ I-I don’t know how I can.” I replied, shocked she was asking me for help. “You have to! I am scheduled to die in 3 days' time! I will be burned!” She wailed. As soon as she uttered that last word I started to feel dizzy, like

the ground underneath me was spinning in some kind of messed-up dance. “Please, I am begging you! Don’t let them murder me!”. That was the last thing I heard before the ground swallowed me whole.

My eyes shot open and I jumped out of my bed. Wait, my bed? I spun around and took in my surroundings. I was in my bedroom and everything was still dark, I looked at the clock on my side table. It read 1:30 am, was it all a dream? It has to be, there's no possible way that it was real. I probably just saw a picture of that girl somewhere and my mind sculpted the dream. That idea helped to soothe my millions of worries. I then climbed back into my bed, hoping I could try and sleep and gather my sanity.

That did not happen. I tossed and turned all night and my nightmares were full of her. The girl followed me to many different dreamscapes, most of them involving her screaming for help and me not making it in time. The last dream was like no other, I will remember it for the rest of my life. She was on some kind of stage, bound to a tall log of wood. She would scream for me but as soon as I reached the first step of the stage the sky would turn red. A lightning bolt of fire would rain down onto the log and set her ablaze. She would let out the most agony-filled screams as she was burned alive. But at the last minute before the flames took over her completely, the wind carried a whisper. “Joan, my name is Joan… Come and save me before it is too late.” Then the dream would abruptly end, transporting me back to my bed. But this time when I woke up it was dawn. The rest of the day all I could think about was her. Why is she going to be murdered? Is this even real? Why me? Am I going insane? Eventually, my thoughts got the best of me and I googled Joan Burned. Then came the name Joan of Arc.

How? Why me? This can’t be happening. So many things were going through my head but at the same time, my head was empty. I started to hyperventilate, this can’t be happening.

None of this is real, I am probably just asleep. I pinched my arm until it bruised, why am I still awake? I started to rock back and forth and the floor started to spin. It spun and spun till everything went black. I woke up on the floor, but not my floor. Something was scratching my cheek and I was scared to see what it was. The wind was hitting my body so I knew I was outside. I slowly opened my eyes and immediately regretted it. Sun pierced my eyes while the sky spun, making me immediately dizzy. I rolled over and threw up everything I had in my stomach. This can't be happening… not again. As I dry heaved a few more times something brushed my head. I surged forward screaming hysterically but I was having a hard time running away. As I jumped up I immediately fell forward, it felt like weights were covering my body. I looked down and my body was covered in some sort of armor. What the hell is happening? As I hunched over questioning my sanity, I felt something hovering over me. This is when I die. I slowly looked up and was met with a face. The face of a horse. Why is there a horse staring at me?

I slowly stood up, trying to stay balanced with the weird armor I was wearing. I turned towards the horse and slowly stuck out my hand as I studied it. It was a tall gray horse with a saddle, with no hesitation it walked up to my hand and leaned in. "Hey, buddy. Where did you come from?" I asked. "Great. Now I am talking to horses, god I couldn't get crazier." I stumbled towards the horse's saddle and noticed there was a bag attached. My curiosity won and I opened the bag, what was inside surprised me even more than the random horse.

Inside the bag were several things, I unhooked the bag and poured everything onto the ground. Inside there was a small sleeping bag, those weird food packs called MREs, a survival kit with a first aid kit, a string of pearls, my foraging book (how did that get here?), a water bottle filter, matches, a small pot, and an old notebook. I didn't think it could get weirder but it

did. I stuffed everything back in except for the old notebook. As I opened the weathered notebook I noticed that it was all writing. There were words in an unfamiliar language, and as I studied it closer I noticed some of the words were in English. They were common phrases in English with a word in the mystery language next to them. Just then it hit me, it's a translator. I recognized the word Bonjour and realized this foreign language was French.

I briefly flipped through the book confused, “Why would I need this?” I thought. The horse started nudging me with its head, at first gentle but then it became rough. “What?” I asked, annoyed. I swear it knew what I was saying as it gestured to its back. “Do you want a pet?” I asked the horse. It looked at me like I was the most stupid thing it had ever met. Once again it flung its head towards its back, but this time it was a lot more animated. “Is there something wrong with your saddle?” I sound insane. Once again the horse looked at me like I had no brain. “Ohh, you want me to get onto the saddle.” I finally knew what it was trying to tell me. The horse looked at me exasperated, it was so done with my obliviousness. I slipped one leg into a stirrup and kicked my leg into the other once I was on top. As soon as I was settled it started galloping. “What the hell!” I screamed. No matter how much I tried it would not slow down.

We rode through meadows and woods, scaring the wildlife. We still hadn’t slowed down when the sun set, it may have been cool but my whole body was hot. I was chafed In places I didn't think I could get chafed in. The metal armor dug into my whole body like a torture device. I eventually zoned out trying to ignore the pain, then I was shocked back into reality when the horse abruptly stopped. My head snapped up and I noticed we were on a hill overlooking a medieval village. It was silent, too silent, the air was so tense that it made the hair on my arms stand up. There was no breeze and no noise, not even crickets. It was like the whole valley was holding its breath, waiting. But waiting for what? The horse slowly started to turn around and

continued down the grassy hill. As we got closer to the village I noticed the tents, there were quite a few but they were very modest. The tents just looked like canvas strung up on sticks. “Where am I?”

As we reached the outskirts of the makeshift camp the sun started to rise. The once quiet valley started to wake up, people dressed in armor slowly dragged themselves out of the tent exhausted. Then out of a tent came someone familiar, as soon as I saw her face I knew who she was. It was Joan of Arc, the very same from my weird fever dreams. But here at this moment she looked younger, she looked happy. She wasn’t covered in bites, she wasn’t underweight, and she wasn’t an empty shell of a person. I started to dismount the horse and as soon as my legs hit the ground they shook like a newborn lamb. I must have made some kind of noise because our eyes locked and she quickly walked over. “I knew you would come, he told me last night.” She whispered to me. Her eyes were piercing and her hair cut in a sharp bob. “I'm sorry what?” I asked in awe and fainted.

I slowly woke up on the floor hearing many voices arguing. The once mushed-together voices started to untangle into two separate ones. One of the voices I could understand but the other was in another language. They were arguing over me as I slowly opened my eyes. “We need to go!..... I don’t care!........ He told me the time is now!” A familiar voice spoke. Someone was responding in a weird language. As soon as my eyes were fully open the arguing ceased. A strange man with shaggy hair hunched over my body and whispered something. Then raced over to a familiar face, Joan. She looked sour, frustrated, and in a weird way, antsy. “He's finally awake! Now we can move out!” She declared, making my head throb.

I rolled onto my side holding my head and groaning. The unfamiliar man said something to Joan that I couldn’t understand. “What?” I asked. The strange man looked at me confused and

asked Joan something. “What do you mean you can’t understand him, La Hire?” Joan yelled at him frustrated. Angry gibberish followed from the man named La Hire. He stomped out of the makeshift tent and returned with a bowl. He slammed the bowl into Joan's hand and started to pace. “ Eat. I will have no weak soldiers in my war,” Joan said and tried force-feeding me. I quickly pushed the bowl away, it ended up flying out of Joan's hands and splattering the tent in an oatmeal-like substance. I couldn’t eat their food! Who knows what's in it, ancient unknown food could end me. “Oh…Sorry, my arms moved on their own! I have my own food, you don’t need to waste it on me.” I whispered, scared of what they would do. Joan scoffed. “Do what you want, soldier. Eat quickly then come out of the tent.” Joan and La Hire quickly hustled out of the tent.

I waited till I couldn’t hear their footsteps anymore, then I snuck out of the tent. I tiptoed over to the last place I saw my horse. There it was eating grass, I walked up and carefully pulled out a MRE, and tiptoed back into the tent. I ripped the little plastic bag with my teeth, desperate to eat. I opened it up and inside were crackers. I poured the scrumptious snack into my mouth. My stomach finally stopped trying to eat itself. I stumbled out of the tent and started to look for any familiar faces.

As I started to walk by tents I finally came across a group of people huddled around a campfire. “You come here!” A voice yelled, it was Joan. I walked towards them, trying to stay upright with how heavy the armor was. “Since you will only listen to me, you will stay with me for the rest of the battle.” Joan declared as she stood up. She strutted away and I scurried behind her.

She led me to a new tent, one bigger than the others. “Stay.” She commanded. Joan then walked into the tent while I waited outside, feeling stupid. She rummaged around for a couple of

minutes then rushed out of the tent. In her hands was a real sword, she tried handing it to me but I backed up. “What? Just hold it. How are you supposed to use it if you're scared ?” She said bluntly. “I'm supposed to use it ?!”. I asked confused. “Why else would you be here?” She said and made me hold the sword. The cold silver and worn leather felt strange in my hands. I had never handled a real sword before. It was heavier than I thought it would be, I also felt less cool than I thought. “ I don’t know how to use this!” I screeched. “And? Not my problem. Come on we are leaving soon” Joan stated while walking away. I stumbled behind her, weighted down by the sword and armor. She led me to a group of people tacking their horses. They were in the same armor as me and all had various weapons hanging at their sides. My horse somehow ended up near them, grazing and drinking water.

“I am assuming that this guy is your horse, he was with you when you fainted.” Joan said, walking up to the horse. I followed her and stared at the horse confused. “Why are you still here?” I wondered. Joan then moved towards a black horse that was right next to us. She hopped into the saddle and gestured for me to do the same. “What about the sword?” I asked, holding it awkwardly. “ Just put it into the sheath attached to your waist.” She said while pointing to her waist, which had a sword hanging from it. I looked down and realized that I had a holster just like her. I slid the weapon into its new home, I hope I never have to use it. I stiffly swung my body into the saddle, scared I would stab the horse. I reached into my saddle bag and pulled out the water filter thing. I shook it and realized it already had water in it. I opened it and chugged half of it, realizing how thirsty I was. “What is that contraption?” Joan asked, confused. “Oh, I made it…It's to hold water.” I stuttered realizing my mistake. “Oh, interesting. Anyway stranger, where are you from?” She asked. “Um…I am from a small village. It's so far you wouldn’t know its name or anything.” I quickly said, nervous. “Interesting. Speaking of names, what is yours?”

She asked the question I had been waiting for. “I'm James…” I said, making up a random name. “Ok, James...I am Joan.” She said suspiciously. “Enough, let's finish the task at hand.” Joan declares. She made a clicking noise, encouraging her horse to walk. I copied her and started to follow behind.

Joan led us to the edge of the makeshift base where La Hire and a group of soldiers were waiting. Everyone was on horseback and in matching armor except La Hire. We waited at the edge of the “village” for the others, an hour passed and everyone had gathered. “Today marks another battle against our enemies. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is watching over us and has told me will win. Some of us will perish but for the greater good. Let us save Orleans and get rid of these sinner invaders. To France!” Joan screamed, raising the spirits of her army. After everyone had calmed down from her inspiring speech we set off. I followed closely behind her waiting for instructions. After ten minutes of her saying nothing I broke the silence. “What should I do? Is there anything I should know before the battle? I don’t know how to fight.” I rambled. “Silence stranger. God will protect you and just swing the sword. My advice is to not die.” She said annoyed. I huffed but stayed quiet till we reached the entrance to the wall around the village. “You two, start the infiltration and give us the signal that we can enter.” She said while pointing to two men at the back of the group.

We sat outside the gate till we heard a whistle and the gate opened. Everyone rushed in and was immediately met with chaos. The English soldiers that were left were desperately trying to get the upper hand. Arrows were flying everywhere, metal against metal grated threw out the town. I was overwhelmed and didn’t know what to do or where to look. “James, pay attention!” Screamed Joan as she nudged my horse. I was brought back to reality and quickly dodged an arrow and continued to follow Joan. We weaved through the chaos and bloodshed till we reached

the center of the village. The center of the village was a disaster, glass crunched under the horses from broken windows. There were dead corpses littering the ground, painting the ground a morbid red. It was oddly quiet at the once bustling heart of the town. Too quiet. We looked around and the only signs of life other than us were the clanking of the battle at the gates.

"Where is everyone?" As soon as I finished the last syllable an English soldier popped out from behind a house. Next thing I knew I was on my back in the dirt and Joan was holding her neck. The man had shot an arrow at me and she pushed me out of the way, but she wasn't fast enough. Joan turned pale and fell off her horse, I rushed forward and caught her before her head could hit the ground. My body ached from the fall but it was only a distant whisper compared to the pain Joan was in. The arrow stuck out of her neck like a flag mocking me for not paying attention.

"Joan, I am so sorry. This is all my fault." I whispered while cradling her head. "Go, before it is too late. I am fine. Go now, stranger." She rasped. She gave me a look that told me there was no room to argue. I slowly leaned her against the side of a house upright. Rage took control over me as I turned around. I was seething as I took my sword out of its sheath, ready to get revenge. I stalked towards the building he was hiding behind, the pain and exhaustion ignored. I found him a couple of yards away trying to escape. He was leaving a trail of blood as he dragged his body away. I noticed he was missing a leg but I still felt no remorse. I quickly reached him and everything turned red. When the red cleared I was met with him on the ground headless. I felt a weight in my hand not holding the sword. I looked down and there was his head. A reminder of what I had just done, I now had blood on my hands. I threw the head away in horror. I fell to the ground dizzy, I just took his life. I crouched down onto my hands and knees. No, no, no.

This can’t be happening. I put my forehead to the cement looking for something to ground myself to before I broke out into sobs. I felt a hand on my shoulder and flinched away. I looked up and noticed it was Joan. “Joan, you're ok!” I croaked. “I'm fine, I fixed myself up.” She muttered while looking around and noticing the body. “Oh..oh...It's ok. This happens in war, this isn’t your fault,” She reassured. “But it is. I went after him.” I choked out. “You will never forget, but in time the pain will lessen,” Joan stated. “But what if-” I started then everything began to spin. “No! I need more time!” I screeched. “What do you mean?” Joan asked, confused. “There's so much I need to tell you! Don’t trust anyone! The ones you think care the most will betray you!” I bellowed before everything turned black.

I woke up in a familiar room that I dreaded. I am always forced back into my universe at the worst times. But this time when I woke up there was proof that it happened. In my hands, there was a small droplet of blood like a sick reminder of what I had done. I really do have blood on my hands, now I have murdered two people. I was unable to warn Joan of her future fully, she was as good as dead. That sentence rang in my head for hours…She was good as dead, she was as good as dead, she was good as dead. Little did I know I would meet her again someday.